

Saudi Arabia in 100 Questions

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In the Name of God
Most Gracious, Most Merciful

Preface:

Despite the huge number of foreigners who come to Saudi Arabia every year, many were overwhelmed by the developments in the different spheres and they rarely try to examine or understand customs, traditions and the cultural and social aspects of the Saudi society or other aspects that form the identity of this society. Thus foreigners are unable to portray the real image of Saudi Arabia to the outside world. Even Saudis themselves are unable to convey an accurate portrait of the country, due to the paucity of knowledge to enable them to fulfill this role.

Emanating from a full conviction of the importance of knowledge in intermingling and communication between nations and people and due to the keenness of portraying the true image of our country to others, we have come up with the idea of this book “Saudi Arabia in 100 Questions.” The book aims at presenting a simple, comprehensive and objective picture of the various aspects of life in Saudi Arabia. We have been keen to simplify these answers to cover political, economic, cultural and social aspects and have it reach the reader without boring elaboration or inconsistent abridgement.

1 How did Saudi Arabia become a unified state?

Historians divide the Saudi history into three reigns each one being called a State. The first one started with the historic homage between Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdul Wahab and Prince Mohamed bin Saud in 1745.

The second reign began in 1824 and ended with Imam Abdul Rahman bin Faisal leaving Riyadh. During this period chaos and conflicts between tribes prevailed until the banner of unification was held by King Abdul Aziz bin Abdul Rahman Al-Faisal Al-Saud and thus began the unification and foundation process of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

The third and final stage was the foundation reign. It began in 1902' the date when King Abdul Aziz entered Riyadh and the return of Al-Saud rule after the Kingdom was officially unified under the name of: the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. A Royal Order giving the Kingdom that name was issued in September 1932. The Royal Order came into effect on the 22nd of that month and the title of King Abdul Aziz became (King of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia).

2 When was Saudi Arabia founded?

January 14, 1902 marks the foundation of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as a unified state by the late King Abdul Aziz bin Abdul Rahman Al-Saud. On this date in 1902, and in a daring battle with 60 of his companions, King

Abdul Aziz captured Riyadh. Thus commenced the unification process of the Kingdom, demarcation of its borders and establishment of normal relations with all world countries.

3 What is the geographical location of Saudi Arabia?

Saudi Arabia lies at the crossroads of three continents: Europe, Asia, and Africa. It extends from the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aqaba on the west to the Arabian Gulf in the east. To the north it borders Jordan, Iraq and Kuwait, and to the south, it borders Yemen and the Sultanate of Oman. To the east lie the Arabian Gulf, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Bahrain.

4 What is the official religion of Saudi Arabia and what is its stance vis-à-vis the followers of other religions?

Saudi Arabia is the birthplace of Islam and the land where the Holy Quran was revealed. The Kingdom is also the custodian of the most sacred Islamic shrines “The holy Haram of Makkah and the Prophet’s Mosque in Madinah”. All Saudis are Muslims and Islam is a religion that respects the followers of other heavenly religions “Christianity and Judaism”

Islam recognizes the Prophethood of Jesus and Moses and that a Muslim’s faith is considered incomplete if he

does not believe in all the Prophets sent by God. Islamic teachings promote non compulsion of others to embrace Islam. The rights of non Muslims, who come to work in Saudi Arabia, are respected just as the rights of Muslims coming from other countries.

5 What is the official language in Saudi Arabia and what is the language that can be used by a foreigner who visits the country?

Arabic is the official language in Saudi Arabia. Arabic is spoken by almost 200 million people in more than 20 countries. It is the language of the Qur'an, the Holy Book of Islam, the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and of Arabic poetry and literature.

It is believed that the inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula were the first to use the Arabic language.

Following the expansion of education, the number of Saudis who speak other languages like English, French and German have increased. English is widely used and it is the second language that a visitor to Saudi Arabia can use for communication.

6 How big is Saudi Arabia and what are the prominent topography and climate features?

Saudi Arabia, with an area of about 2,240,000 square kilometers, occupies about 80 percent of the Arabian Peninsula. It stretches between latitudes 36 and 43 to the

east of Grenache line and longitudes 34 and 42 to the north of the Equator.

The topography of Saudi Arabia ranges from plains, mountains, deserts and plateaus. The most famous of the latter is Najed where the Saudi capital Riyadh is located.

The climate of Saudi Arabia is a desert climate characterized by extreme heat during the day, an abrupt drop in temperature at night. The weather is moderate on the northern and south-north heights and humidity rises in the coastal areas. Due to the vast area of Saudi Arabia, temperature and rain fall differ from one area to the other.

7 What about the topography of Saudi Arabia?

The Arabian Peninsula is an ancient massif composed of stable crystalline rock. On the peninsula, the eastern line of the Great Rift fault is visible in the steep and, in places, high escarpment that parallels the Red Sea between the Gulf of Aqaba and the Gulf of Aden. A second lower escarpment, the Jabal Tuwaiq, runs north to south through the area of Riyadh.

The northern half of the region of the Red Sea escarpment is known as the Hijaz and the more rugged southern half as Asir. In the south, a coastal plain, the Tihamah, rises gradually from the sea to the mountains. A long, narrow strip of desert known as Ad Dahna separates Najd from eastern Arabia, which slopes eastward to the sandy coast along the Arabian Gulf. North of Najd a larger

desert, An Nafud, isolates the heart of the Peninsula from the steppes of northern Arabia. South of Najd lies one of the largest sand deserts in the world, the Rub al Khali, or empty quarter, which covers an area of 640,000 square kilometers.

The western coastal escarpment can be considered two mountain ranges separated by a gap in the vicinity of Makkah. The northern range in the Hijaz seldom exceeds 2,100 meters, and the elevation gradually decreases toward the south to about 600 meters around Makkah. The eastern slopes are less steep and are marked by dry river beds (wadis) that trace the courses of ancient rivers and continue to lead the rare rainfalls down to the plains. Scattered oases, drawing water from springs and wells in the vicinity of the wadis, permit some settled agriculture.

Across the peninsula as a whole, the plateau slopes toward the east from an elevation of 1,360 meters in the west to 750 meters at its easternmost limit. A number of wadis cross the region in an eastward direction from the Red Sea escarpment toward the Arabian Gulf. There is little pattern to these remains of ancient riverbeds; the most important of them are Wadi Ar Rummah, Wadi As Surr, and Wadi Bisha.

Three great deserts isolate Najd from north, east, and south as the Red Sea escarpment does from the west. In the north, the An Nafud--sometimes called the Great Nafud because An Nafud is the term for desert--covers about 55,000 square kilometers at an elevation of about 1,000 meters. Longitudinal dunes--scores of kilometers in length and as much as ninety meters high, and separated by

valleys as much as sixteen kilometers wide--characterize the An Nafud.

8 What about the population of Saudi Arabia?

According to the census conducted by the Central Department of Statistics of the Saudi Ministry of Economy and Planning in 2005, the population of the Kingdom is estimated at 22.673.000 and foreigners constitute between 25 to 27% of the population. Population annual growth rate is about 4%. Those who are under 40 represent 80% of the total population while those under 15 represent 40%.

9 What is Saudi Arabia's official emblem and what does it mean?

The official emblem of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a palm tree and two crossed swords. The crossed swords symbolize justice and strength rooted in faith. From ancient times the sword occupies an important place among Arabs as it is the weapon for defense and the spreading of justice.

The palm tree represents vitality and growth. Saudis as well as Arabs and Muslims admire dates as it is mentioned in the holy Quran and the Sunnah (Prophet Mohammed Sayings). Moreover, dates is of economic, social and nutritional importance to the life of Saudis.

10 What about the Saudi flag and why it never flies half-mast?

The flag of Saudi Arabia is green, rectangular with its width equal to two thirds of its length. The green color symbolizes prosperity and development. In the middle of the flag is the shahada “ There is no god but Allah and Mohammed is His Messenger”. Under it is a sword placed horizontally. The flag is never flown at half-mast as it bears the Islamic profession of faith. Saudi Arabia is the land of Islam, advocates Islam and extends services to pilgrims.

The inscription of the profession of faith is in white as is the sword which is a symbol of honor, dignity and justice for Arabs and Muslims.

11 What about the calendar used in Saudi Arabia?

In all its official transactions, Saudi Arabia follows the Hijri calendar. It is the date when Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) migrated from Makkah to Madinah in 622A.D. The Hijri calendar is used in the Kingdom as it is the birthplace of Islam and the migration of Prophet Mohammed from Makkah to Madina represents a landmark in the Islamic dawa (Propagation/call). The calendar follows the lunar year which is 12 months and the days of the month are either 29 or 30.

Saudi Arabia Standard Time is 3 hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (GMT+3).

12 What is the official currency of Saudi Arabia and its denominations?

The official currency of Saudi Arabia is the Saudi riyal which is equal to 100 halalla. One Saudi riyal is about 0.266 US dollar. The paper currency is of different denominations: SR 5, SR 10, SR 20, SR 50, SR 100 and SR 500. The coin currency is of: 100 halalla, 50 halalla, 25 halalla, 10 halalla and 5 halalla.

13 What is the Saudi capital and what are the most important cities?

Riyadh is the capital of Saudi Arabia and the most densely populated city as its population exceeds four million a matter that makes it a huge commercial and industrial city. It includes a number of historical centers, museums, archeological sites as well as Qasr Al-Hukm (The government palace), the ministries and diplomatic missions.

Makkah is the most important city in Saudi Arabia where the holy Haram and Kaaba located. Millions of Muslims from all over the world come to this holy city every year for Hajj (pilgrimage). It is the place where the holy Quran was revealed to Prophet Mohammed.

Madinah is the second most important city and is also the city to which Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) migrated. Madinah also contains the Prophet's Mosque which is visited by millions of Muslims all over the year.

There are other important cities in Saudi Arabia like

Jeddah on the Red Sea which is the Kingdom's main sea port. Jubail and Yanbu are two important industrial cities in Saudi Arabia.

14 Where is the Saudi capital located?

The name Riyadh is derived from the Arabic word meaning a place of gardens and trees ("rawdah"). In pre-Islamic times, the settlement at the site was called "Hajar" after a famous Arab tribe and since the 12th century Hijra it has come to be known as Riyadh.

Riyadh is located at 30°-91 and 30-27 North, 42°-48 East. It includes the capital Riyadh and 19 provinces with a total area of 17% of the Kingdom's area.

The weather is dry and hot in the summer and cold in the winter with low humidity.

15 What about the most prominent economic activities of the Saudis?

Saudi Arabia is distinguished by its numerous economic activities. The most important of these activities is the extraction of oil and its associated industries like petrochemical, pesticides and others. In addition there is agriculture, industry, animal breeding, fisheries, tourism and real estate. In rural areas some people still make a living off of breeding animals, hand crafts and rain-dependent agriculture.

With the vast developments witnessed by Saudi Arabia, many have looked to trade as a source of income

and they have realized good success at the domestic level, with partnership with foreign companies or as agents to international companies.

16 What is the greeting said by a Saudi to others and what does it mean?

(Assalamu alaykum wa rahmatu allahi wa barakatu) is the Islamic greeting that a Muslim should say to anyone he meets whether a close friend or stranger.

It is a prayer to God to bestow His blessing and peace on the other party. Whoever receives this greeting should answer (wa alaukmu assalam wa rahmatu allahi wa barakatu). Instead of the long greeting one can say (Assalamu alaykum) and the answer is “wa alaykum assalam.”

17 What are the features of the system of government and constitution in Saudi Arabia?

The Saudi Basic Law of Governance stipulates that the Holy Qur'an and the Sunnah are the base for all laws in Saudi Arabia and that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is an Arab and Islamic sovereign state; its religion is Islam, its constitution is the holy Quran and Arabic is its official language.

The type of government is monarchy and the rule is based on justice, consultation and equity according to the Islamic Sharia. The rule is for the sons and grandsons of the Kingdom's founder King Abdul Aziz Al-Saud.

The authority in Saudi Arabia consists of three authorities: Judiciary, Executives and Regulatory. The judiciary is independent.

18 Who are the Kings who ruled the Saudi modern state?

King Abdul Aziz bin Abul Rahman Al-Saud is the founder of modern Saudi Arabia and was the first King after the official unification of Saudi Arabia in 1932.

King Abdul Aziz passed away in 1953 and was succeeded by his eldest son King Saud who paid great attention to education and opened the first university in the Arabian Peninsula which is King Saud University in Riyadh.

In November 2, 1964, the then Crown Prince Faisal bin Abdul Aziz became the King of Saudi Arabia and when he died in 1975 he was succeeded by his brother king Khaled bin Abdul Aziz and Prince Fahd bin Abdul Aziz became the Crown Prince.

After King Khaled passed away in June 13, 1982, King Fahd became the King and when the latter passed away in 2005, Prince Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz becomes King of Saudi Arabia and Prince Sultan bin Abdul Aziz Crown Prince.

19 What about the profile of Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz?

King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz Al-Saud was born in

Riyadh in 1924. He received early traditional education under the supervision of a number of ulema (Muslim scholars) in mosques. In 1964 he was appointed by King Faisal as head of the National Guard and in 1975 he was appointed by King Khaled as second deputy premier alongside his previous post. In 1982, he was given the pledge of allegiance as Crown Prince after his brother King Fahd became King. Then a royal order was issued appointing him as first deputy premier, commander of the National Guard in addition to his post as Crown Prince.

When King Fahd passed away in 2005, Prince Abdullah becomes the King.

King Abdullah assumed a number of posts. To mention for example; deputy chairman of the higher committee of King Abdul Aziz City for Science and Technology, Chairman of the Supreme Economic Council, deputy chairman of the Supreme Council for Petroleum and Minerals Affairs, chairman of King Abdul Aziz foundation for the Gifted, chairman of the General Investment Authority, deputy chairman of the Civil Service Council and chairman of King Abdul Aziz Center for National Dialogue. Thanks to the efforts of King Abdullah, the Kingdom enjoys strong relations with Arab and non Arab countries due to the fact that he has made many overseas official visits and represented Saudi Arabia in a number of conferences and meetings. He is highly respected among his people.

King Abdullah plays a significant role in charity and humanitarian fields. The establishment of King Abdul Aziz Library in Riyadh and King Abdul Aziz Foundation in Morocco indicates the support he gives to education and knowledge.

20 Is it a prerequisite that the ruler of Saudi Arabia is given the title the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques?

The late King Fahd bin Abdul Aziz was the first Saudi King who was officially called the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques due to his tremendous efforts in the service of Islam and Muslims and the great attention he gave to the two holy mosques which are the holy Haram in Makkah and the Prophet's mosque in Madinah. The expansion of the two holy mosques has cost large sums of money and helped accommodate large number of annual pilgrims and visitors.

It was announced officially on October 27, 1986 that King Fahd would be called Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques and after King Fahd passed away King Abdullah was keen to be called by this name.

21 What about the root of the Saudi Royal family?

The root of Al Saud family that today rules the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia goes back to the tribe of Hanifa bin Lujaim from Bakr bin Wael bin Asad bin Rabeah which is one of the ancient tribes in the Arabian Peninsula. Before taking this name, the Al-Saud family was called Al-Miqren after Miqren bin Markhan, the grandfather of Imam Mohammed bin Saud, the founder of the first Saudi state. The history of Al-Saud is dated back to the pre-Islamic era.

It is known that who ever belongs to Bakr bin Wael is a descendent of Prophet Mohammed.

Al-Saud was one of the ancient ruling families in the Arabian Peninsula. One of their grandfathers, Manei, was the founder of Deriyha city known throughout history as the “capital of Al-Saud”.

But many historians named the family of Al-Saud after Prince Saud bin Mohammed bin Miqren who died in 1725.

22 What about the profile of Crown Prince Sultan bin Abdul Aziz?

Prince Sultan bin Abdul Aziz Al- Saud was born on January 5, 1928 in Riyadh. He received early traditional education under the tutelage of a number of ulema (Muslim scholars) in mosques.

In 1947 he was appointed by King Abdul Aziz as governor of Riyadh, the capital of Saudi Arabia.

In 1953 when the first Saudi cabinet was formed, he was appointed as minister of agriculture and in 1955 he was appointed as minister of communication.

In 1962 Prince Sultan was appointed as minister of defense and aviation. He contributed significantly to the modernization of the Saudi army and supplied the army with modern weapons from the East and the West.

In 1982, a royal order was issued appointing Prince Sultan as second deputy premier. For a long period he chaired the meetings of the Higher Committee for Education Policies, the Higher Committee for Administrative Reform and the Manpower Councils.

Currently he chairs the Higher Commission for Islamic Call and the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs, the board of directors of the Saudi Arabian Airlines, the National Commission for Wildlife Conservation and Development (NCWCD), the Ministerial Committee for Environment, the board of directors of the General Corporation for Military Industries, the Higher Committee for Economic Offset and the supreme chairman of Prince Sultan bin Abdul Aziz Charitable Foundation.

In 2005, Prince Sultan becomes the Crown Prince.

23 What about the parliamentary system in Saudi Arabia?

Shoura (consultation) is a fundamental principle of ruling in the Islamic sharia. The holy Quran is the constitution of Saudi Arabia and it has been keen to apply these principles with means that differ to the ones that were applied in other countries. Saudi Arabia has a parliament which is known as the Shoura (Consultative) Council with members representing the different regions and tribes. It also includes ulema (Muslim scholars), academics, notables and experts. The Shoura, whose members are appointed, reviews and discusses all laws and government decisions before they are sent to the cabinet for approval.

Within the framework of the reforms initiated by the government, the members of the Council were increased to 150. The viewpoints of women were taken when women's issues were discussed at the Shoura Council. Elections for the selection of members of municipal councils were

conducted all over the Kingdom with the aim of expanding the participation of citizens in running domestic affairs and monitoring the government performance.

24 What about the characteristics of the Saudi judicial System and is it independent?

The judiciary in Saudi Arabia is a fully independent body affiliated directly to the Council of Ministers and the state never intervenes in its tasks and rulings. The judiciary works are supervised by a supreme council whose chairman and members are appointed by a Royal Decree. The role of the ministry of justice is confined to regulatory matters and it never intervenes in the tasks of the Supreme Judicial Council.

The Supreme Judicial Council appoints the judges and monitors the overall process of litigations at the different courts.

Few years ago lawyers were allowed to open offices in Saudi Arabia. The lawyers represent their clients in courts according to the laws and regulations prevailing in the Kingdom.

25 What is the party responsible for Ifta (Islamic legal opinion) in Saudi Arabia?

The permanent Commission for Islamic Research and Ifta is the official body assigned to issue legal opinions on matters related to the Islamic sharia. The Commission is chaired by the Kingdom's grand mufti and includes

five permanent members of the senior Ulema (Muslim scholars) board. The Commission can be contacted by phone and questions can also be sent to it by fax.

26 Is Wahabism an Islamic doctrine or a reform call?

Wahabism is not an Islamic or political doctrine as some may think. It is a reform call initiated by the late sheikh Mohammed bin Abdul Wahab, a Muslim scholar whose efforts were to purify Islam from the deviations that had crept into the practices of some of its adherents.

What is known in the Western media as “wahabism” is a latterly-created name that does not express the reality of this reformatory call. This call is not an Islamic or political doctrine as some believe. It is a call that demonstrates Islam’s stand vis-à-vis some violations committed by some Muslims. The call has urged Muslims to resort to the true path of religion according to the teachings of the holy Quran and the Prophet’s Sunnah.

27 Do the regions of Saudi have any administrative or geographical structure?

Geographically Saudi Arabia is divided into four main regions and if we added the Empty Quarter they would equal five regions. They are: the central of Najd Plateau where Riyadh the capital lies, the western region on the Red Sea, the Southern region near the borders with Yemen and the eastern region overlooking the Arabia Gulf.

Administratively, Saudi Arabia is divided into 13 regions namely; Riyadh, Makkah, Madinah, Qassim, the Eastern province, Asir, Tabuk, Hail, the northern frontier region, Jazan, Najran, Al-Baha and Al-Jouf. Each region is ruled by a governor of a rank of minister.

The formation of region governorates and councils indicates the government's keenness to have citizens involved in the management of their affairs according to the needs and conditions in each region.

28 What are the public holidays and the daily working hours in Saudi Arabia?

In Saudi Arabia Thursday and Friday are considered the weekend for government departments. The private sector is closed for one day only which is Friday. There are no other public holidays except for Eid Al-Fitr (after the holy month of Ramadan) and Eid Al-Adha (During the Hajj season). The Kingdom National Day which falls on September 23 is an official holiday too.

Official working hours for government offices are from 7:30 AM to 2:30 PM. In the private sector, the working hours are from 8:30 to 12:00 and from 4:00 PM to 8:30 in the evening.

29 What are the official days celebrated in Saudi Arabia?

Saudi Arabia celebrates only two occasions which are Eid Al-Fitr which comes after the fasting month of

Ramadan and Eid Al-Adha during the annual Hajj season. Saudi Arabia also celebrates its National Day which falls on September 23. The National Day is observed as a holiday in Saudi Arabia.

30 What are the features of the Saudi national dress?

Since ancient times, the thobe (Arabic word for garment), shumagh (head cover) and iqal (a double black cord that holds the head cover in place) are worn by Saudi men.

Still most Saudis continue to wear this dress which represents their peculiarity and identity. In addition, Saudis wear bishts (cloaks) on certain occasions like the Eids, Friday prayer, wedding parties, national events and alike. The thobe, ghutra, shumagh, iqal and bishts are the Saudi national dress.

Saudi women wear a long cloak (abaya) and veil when they leave the house in obedience to the Islamic teachings. When among women, Saudi females may dress as they see fit whilst maintaining a level of propriety.

In the past a man's attire was hand-made at home by Saudi women. Currently there are many specialized shops for tailoring the Saudi dresses and there are also factories for ready-made clothes.

31 Does the spoken language in Saudi Arabia differ from one region to another?

Difference in dialects is something natural. Saudi

Arabia is a large country, so it is not strange that Arabic be spoken in different dialects from one region to the other. It is not easy for a visitor to Saudi Arabia to recognize this difference as it is a minor one, but a Saudi can easily say that this person is from Makkah, Madinah, Jazan or Baha region immediately after he listens to what he is saying. The difference in dialects is clearly recognized among inhabitants of coastal cities and southern region.

32 What does Hajj (Pilgrimage) represent for the Saudi government and people?

Hajj (Pilgrimage) is one of the pillars of Islam. The Saudi government spends millions of Saudi riyals every year for the comfort and tranquility of some three million pilgrims who come from all over the world.

All government apparatus take part in this annual season. The government spends millions of Saudi riyals annually for developing the different sites in the holy shrines. It also spends large sums of money for the accommodation, transportation and treatment of this large number of pilgrims.

33 Are there any government measures for the organization of Hajj?

For the safety of pilgrims, the Saudi government adopts a number of measures and rules in agreement with the governments of Islamic countries and the

Islamic organizations in non-Islamic countries. These measures stipulate that the number of pilgrims should not exceed the capacity of the holy shrines and that an individual, whether from inside or outside the Kingdom, is only to be permitted to perform Hajj once every five years.

For Saudis and expatriates working in Saudi Arabia and who intended to perform Hajj they have to obtain a permit from the Ministry of Interior. The Ministry of Hajj supervises all matters pertain to Hajj.

34 How many mosques are there in Saudi Arabia and what are the most famous ones?

The Saudi government gives utmost concern to mosques. Currently there are more than 22,000 mosques in Saudi Arabia. Al-Haram Mosque in Makkah and the Prophet's Mosque in Madinah are the most famous and sacred mosques in Saudi Arabia and millions of Muslims from all over the world come to visit these two mosques every year. Other famous mosques also are Quba mosque in Madinah and Namera Mosque in Arafat.

The mosques in Saudi Arabia are under the supervision of the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Endowment, Call and Guidance.

35 Why are the foreign embassies located in Riyadh while the consulates are in Jeddah?

Due to the climate of Saudi Arabia, the government

departments move to Jeddah and Taif every year during the Summer which usually extends for more than three months starting in June.

A Large number of government officials also move to the Makkah region during the Hajj season.

For this all foreign embassies are located in Riyadh. Almost all embassies located in the prestigious “Diplomatic Quarter.” The consulates are located in Jeddah as the city is the main Saudi port on the Red Sea and a big economic and cultural center. Jeddah is also the main gateway for the two holy mosques.

36 What are the main features of the education system in Saudi Arabia?

Pre-university education in Saudi Arabia is divided into three stages; Primary, intermediate and secondary. Education syllabi in Saudi Arabia are not different from other countries, except that in Saudi Arabia there is a focus in teaching social sciences, Islamic subjects and the holy Quran. The Ministry of Education has recently started to give more concern to the teaching of computer science and English language.

The Private sector is strongly involved in the education process. Many private schools can be found all over Saudi Arabia, some teach all syllabi in English. Private education is supervised by the Ministry of Education.

37 How many universities are there in Saudi Arabia and which is the oldest?

There are nineteen state universities in Saudi Arabia with more than 35 specializations. The College of sharia at Umma Al-Qura University is the oldest college in Saudi Arabia as it was established in 1949 by the late King Abdul Aziz. King Saud university was established in 1957, the Islamic university in Madinah in 1961, King Abdul Aziz university in 1958, Imam Mohammed bin Saud Islamic university in 1974, King Fahd University for Petroleum and Minerals and King Faisal University 1975, Taiba University in 2002, Qassim University in 2002 and finally King Khaled University in Abha which was established in 1998.

Private higher education in the Kingdom began with the opening of a number of communication and information technology (IT) computer and health colleges. Investment in private higher education is expected to increase soon with more involvement of the private sector.

38 What about religious education in Saudi Arabia and are there any religious schools or universities?

As an Islamic country, Saudi Arabia gives utmost attention to the upbringing of youngsters according to the true Islamic teachings. This takes place at all educational levels for both males and females.

There are public and private schools in Saudi Arabia

for the memorization of the holy Quran. Beside Quran sciences, these schools also teach mathematics, science and foreign languages.

Like other education institutions, all Quran memorization schools are under the supervision of the Ministry of Education. In Saudi universities there are colleges and departments that teach Islamic Call, Jurisdiction and Sharia sciences to graduate Islamic callers and preachers.

39 What about the situation of women in Saudi Arabia?

Islam has preserved all rights for women. When she is a child her father is responsible for her providing her with all that she needs and when she reaches the age of womanhood she has the right to choose her husband and is not compelled to marry someone whom she doesn't like. Her husband is then responsible for her and when she becomes a mother, her children are committed to do all good for her. There are many references in the holy Quran and the sayings and deeds of Prophet Mohammed that preserve the rights of women including her financial independence.

The Saudi woman enjoys all these rights. When employed she gets the same salary as that of a man provided that she has the same level of education and experience. She has the same promotion opportunities. In Islam the woman maintains her name and her father's name even after getting married and she is not obliged to spend for the daily living of the family or for herself even if she is rich.

40 What is the nature of the economic system in Saudi Arabia and the rules governing it?

The Saudi economy adopts the system of free open market based on the rule of supply and demand. There are no restrictions or exceptional measures for the freedom of trade and its flow from and to Saudi Arabia. Domestic products can be found side by side with the products of major world companies. The Saudi government grants big incentives for foreign and joint ventures investments.

Companies shares are floated in the Saudi Capital Market (the Bourse). In recent years, Saudi Arabia moves to adopt more policies and programs for the activation of the market economy a matter that leads to its accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO).

41 Saudi Arabia is an oil producing country. What is the volume of its oil production and its reserves?

Saudi Arabia's production of oil is estimated to be between 10 to 11 million of crude oil per day thus making it the world's largest oil producer. Its reserve is estimated to be more than 264 billion barrels. Saudi Arabia also produces large quantities of natural gas with the reserves standing at 242 trillion cubic feet making Saudi Arabia number four among gas producing countries and its reserves of gas make it the fifth among other countries. The eastern province is the Kingdom's richest area in term

of oil and gas. There a number of associated industries like oil refinery, petrochemicals, fertilizers and others.

Saudi Arabia has the capability to raise its production to 4 million barrel per day in case of emergency to guarantee stability of the world markets and in consultation with OPEC.

International energy sources expect high increase in the Saudi oil production and reserves capacity during the coming two decades.

42 How many oil fields and wells are there in Saudi Arabia, and what are the biggest ones?

Experts of oil and mining sector estimate that there are 80 oil fields in Saudi Arabia with about 1000 wells. Most of the Kingdom's current production comes from only 8 oil fields. The biggest of these fields is Al-Ghawar, which is considered as the largest conventional oil field in the world with oil reserves estimated at 70 billion barrels. Al-Sufaniya is the largest offshore oil field with an estimated 35 billion barrel of oil reserves. Other highly productive fields are Qateef and Abu Saafa.

43 Is oil the only source of income for Saudi Arabia and what about its contribution to the national income?

Oil is the key source of the income of Saudi Arabia. Oil revenues constitute between 70 to 80 % of the state's revenues. In an attempt to find other sources like

agriculture, animal resources, industry and tourism, Saudi Arabia has, since the seventies, begun a long-term program to benefit from oil revenues in upgrading its infrastructure and developing its human resources in order to diversify its income and lessen dependency on oil.

Saudi Arabia has succeeded in developing its agriculture, industry and tourism sectors. These sectors are now actively involved in the increase of the state's financial resources. This began to gain momentum following the increasing role of the private sector in economic development and the incentives granted by the government to businessmen and investors.

44 What are the major companies involved in oil industry in Saudi Arabia?

The state- owned Saudi Aramco is the biggest oil company in Saudi Arabia. It is an international oil company in term of the diversity of its activities like oil exploration, production, refining and marketing and shipping to all parts of the world. The company discovers two giant oil fields, they are Al-Ghawar, in the eastern province and Al-Sufaniya, an oil field offshore the Arabian Gulf.

Saudi Aramco is ranked eighth globally in term of refinery as it has a capacity of 3.4 million barrels per day. The company owns and operates the second biggest shipping fleet in the world. The company has 54,000 employees, 85% of them are Saudis.

The company has a number of joint ventures and offices around the world. For the past seventeen years, the company continues to occupy the first position among

the world oil companies according to the classification of *Petroleum Intelligence Weekly*.

45 What are the ports through which Saudi oil is exported to the world?

There are several ports on the Arabian Gulf and the Red Sea through which the Saudi oil is exported. The most important of these ports is Yanbu with a capacity of five million barrels per day.

Ras Tanura on the Arabia Gulf is one of the biggest ports for oil export in the world with a capacity of more than six million barrels per day. The total capacity of the Saudi ports is 14 million barrels per day which exceeds by 3 million the Kingdom daily production. The Saudi government constantly works for the increase of its oil export ports, providing these ports with the latest technologies in an effort to increase their capacities.

46 What are the major markets to which the Saudi oil is exported?

The Saudi oil is exported to most parts of the world. At the forefront of these countries is the United States with an average of 1.5 to 2 million barrels, or 15 to 20% of the US oil imports, are exported everyday. This makes Saudi Arabia the third largest oil supplier to the United States after Canada and Mexico.

Other Asian markets like China and India absorb around 60% of the Kingdom oil exports (More than 4.5 million barrels a day). Saudi Arabia is keen to have a daily surplus of 1.5 to 2 million barrels a day that can be used when needed. This guarantees constant supplies of oil to the world market without violating the decisions of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).

47 What are the most important Saudi exports and imports?

Saudi Arabia is among the biggest 23 exporting countries in the world. According to 2006 statistics, Saudi exports reached around 170.5 billion dollars. Oil is the major product exported by Saudi Arabia as it constitutes more than 85%. Other exports include industrial and agricultural products.

Petrochemicals are on top of industrial, non-oil products exported by Saudi Arabia representing 46.2% followed by plastic products (19.7%), minerals (9.8%), electrical appliances (3.8%) while non industrial exports reached 20%.

Statistics indicate a growth in the Saudi non-oil exports, the value of which is expected to reach more than 20.25 billion dollar according to a 2006 report by the Saudi Exports Promotion Centre.

Saudi imports are estimated at 40 billion dollars. Cars, medicines, electrical and electronic appliances, leather products, foodstuff and textiles are the key imports of Saudi Arabia.

48 What are the most important industries in Saudi Arabia?

Beside oil refinery industries, there are a number of industries in Saudi Arabia, namely steel, cement, construction materials, plastic industries, glass, canning and preservation of vegetables and fruits, dates, juice and dairy products.

The private sector invests mainly in furniture, gold formation and shoes. Every city in Saudi Arabia has an industrial zone with various operating factories.

As the Saudi market consumes most of the products, so export of domestic products is limited to few products like cement, petrochemicals and foodstuff.

49 What are the major industrial cities in Saudi Arabia?

The major industrial cities in Saudi Arabia are located in Jubail industrial city at the coast of the Arabian Gulf and in Yanbu industrial city at the Red Sea coast.

The Royal Commission for Jubail and Yanbu supervises the operation of the two cities. The eastern province, where Dammam is the largest city, is a headquarter for major oil industries. Rabigh at the Red Sea coast is also home to a number of industries.

Recently work has started on the construction of King Abdullah Economic City. It is the biggest integrated city in Saudi Arabia and the world. It is located at the Red

Sea coast with an area of 55 million square meters and total investments exceeding 27 billion dollars. The City has a land port and big industrial zone covering an area of 8 million square meters, offices for regional and international finance companies, a centre for exhibitions and conferences and a tourism area that includes large number of resorts and hotels. There is also a residential area and educational institutions.

50 What are the major non-oil industrial companies in Saudi Arabia?

The Saudi Basic Industries Corporation (SABIC) is the biggest non-oil industrial company in Saudi Arabia. SABIC was established in 1976 to add value to Saudi Arabia's natural hydrocarbon resources. Today, SABIC is among the leading petrochemical companies in terms of sales and product diversity. Headquartered in Riyadh, SABIC is the Middle East's largest non-oil industrial company. (Global Ranking)

SABIC's businesses are grouped into six strategic business units, supported by corporate departments and a Shared Services organization. The SBU's are Basic Chemicals; Intermediates; Polyolefins; PVC and Polyester; Fertilizers and Metals. SABIC's manufacturing network in Saudi Arabia consists of 18 affiliates. Most of these are based in the Al-Jubail Industrial City on the Arabian Gulf. Two are located in Yanbu Industrial City on the Red Sea and one in the eastern province city of Dammam. SABIC is also partners in three regional ventures based in Bahrain.

In July 2002, SABIC Europe was born after the acquisition of the petrochemicals business of Dutch group DSM. SABIC Europe employs 2,300 people and has two major manufacturing locations in Geleen in the Netherlands and Gelsenkirchen in Germany.

The vision that led to the creation of SABIC was closely associated with the aspirations of Saudi Arabia as a developing nation. SABIC continues to play an important role in achieving some of those aspirations, including the development of the country's human resources.

SABIC is owned by the Saudi Government (70%) and the private sector (30%). Private sector shareholders are from Saudi Arabia and other countries of the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)

51 What about the volume and type of agricultural sector in Saudi Arabia?

The agricultural sector in Saudi Arabia has witnessed significant qualitative developments during the past two decades. The government undertook a multifaceted program to modernize and commercialize this sector. Support involved substantial expenditures on infrastructure, which included the supply of electricity, irrigation, drainage, secondary road systems, and other transportation facilities for distribution and marketing. This has led to the Kingdom reaching a self-sufficient level in a number of crops like wheat. Saudi Arabia exports nearly two million tons of wheat annually. Qassim and Kharj are the major agricultural areas in the Kingdom.

Beside Wheat, Saudi Arabia also produces cereals, vegetables and fruits. Large amounts of these products are consumed locally.

52 What is the volume of date production in Saudi Arabia?

With more than 23 million date palms under cultivation, Saudi Arabia is the world's largest date producer with a production of 950,000 tons every year. It produces 20% of the world total production. Dates contribute more than 13% of the total value of the agricultural production in the Kingdom.

Qassim is the most famous region in Saudi Arabia for date production as it has the biggest date farm in the world with 250,000 palm trees.

Despite this huge production, Saudi Arabia exports only 5% of its annual production as the majority is consumed locally. The government began diversifying its production and entering new markets. Currently there are more than 300 varieties of dates being produced in the Kingdom, like *Maneefi*, *Naboot Saif*, *Hilali*, *Barhi*, *Sukari* and others. About 50 or 60 of these types have built a significant niche in international markets. The Kingdom has more than 40 dates factories.

53 What is the volume of animal production and investment in animal resources?

Camel, sheep and cow breeding is an old activity in Saudi Arabia as it has been widely practiced by Bedouins

and nomads years before the discovery of oil. Animal breeding has developed significantly in the past few years. Nowadays large farms for cattle breeding can be seen in Saudi Arabia with large quantities of dairy products.

Investment in animal production is estimated at billions of Saudi riyals. Fish production has also developed significantly.

The production of meat in Saudi Arabia is not meeting local consumption, as a result large quantities of sheep are imported annually particularly during the Hajj season.

54 Is there any party through which one can learn about investment opportunities in Saudi Arabia?

The Saudi Arabian General Investment Authority (SAGIA) is the gateway to investment in Saudi Arabia. SAGIA seeks to improve the investment climate in the Kingdom by conducting surveys of laws, regulations and procedures that have implications on investment. It conducts studies to benchmark the Kingdom's competitiveness in attracting investments, and that determine the administrative barriers to foreign and domestic investments.

SAGIA has also been actively engaged in dialogue and cooperation at various levels with several international organizations, such as the United Nations. For the coming five years SAGIA's strategy focuses on attracting local and foreign investments for three major sectors; namely: energy, transportation and information and communication. SAGIA releases a regular bulletin on

investment opportunities and incentives in Saudi Arabia.

The Council of the Saudi Chambers of Commerce and Industry, which includes representatives from the 13 chambers Kingdomwide, plays a vital role in encouraging investments in Saudi Arabia and increasing opportunities of partnership with foreign investors.

55 Are foreign investors allowed to invest in Saudi Arabia and are there any incentives offered to them?

There are no obstacles and barriers before foreign investors in Saudi Arabia. The 1980's and 1990's had witnessed a trend of attracting foreign investments and the return of Saudi and Arab capitals to Saudi Arabia. There are no restrictions on the transfer of foreign currency. The Saudi riyal is pegged against the US dollar and it is fixed exchange rate, since 1986, is SR 3.75 for one dollar.

In the year 2000, the foreign investment Act was issued. Within this Act taxes against foreign companies were reduced to 30% from 45%. The Act also allows foreigners to own real estate for their businesses and employ foreign workers.

Expatriates in Saudi Arabia are allowed to trade in the Saudi stock market.

56 Are there any free trade zones in Saudi Arabia?

Currently there are no free trade zones in Saudi Arabia and there are no customs obstacles preventing the flow of

commodities into the Kingdom. With the development of new tools of world economy, it seems there is a need for establishing free trade zones in Saudi Arabia.

The Council of the Saudi Chambers of Commerce and Industry has proposed the establishment of three free trade zones in the eastern province, Jazan and the Western region. A decision is likely to be issued in this regard particularly after Saudi Arabia joined the World Trade Organization (WTO).

57 Are there any Sale Seasons in Saudi Arabia?

The nature of the Saudi open market and the competition between companies operating in the same field can be clearly observed during sale seasons which are often held in the summer. A number of Saudi cities seized the opportunity of summer festivals to attract tourists and visitors. One of the famous bazaars is the one organized annually in Riyadh at Qasr Al-Hukm (government Palace). Thousands of visitors flock to this, one-week long festival.

In Saudi Arabia sales are often held on certain occasions like the advent of the holy month of Ramadan, the Eids, the start of the new school year and the start of school summer holiday.

58 How many banks are there in Saudi Arabia and who monitors their performance?

There are many banks in Saudi Arabia with more than

1300 branches Kingdomwide. Automatic teller machines (ATM) are widely used in Saudi Arabia. Through these ATMs one can withdraw and deposit cash and transfer money inside and outside Saudi Arabia.

Saudi banks are currently enabling their customers to benefit from the Internet for their bank's dealings like account opening and money transfer. The Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency (SAMA) is the party which supervises and monitors the performance of all local and foreign banks operating in the Kingdom and establishes laws and rules organizing the performance of these banks.

59 From where does Saudi Arabia generate electric power and which party is responsible for power production and regulation of consumption?

Saudi Arabia generates electric power from two main sources: the desalination stations and power generators that operate with fuel. The Ministry of Water and Electricity is the government department that is responsible for this vital sector.

The Saudi Electricity Company (SEC), a stock company with the government owning the majority of its stakes, is the party responsible for the regulation of electric consumption, performance of maintenance, repair of faults and collection of bills.

Electric current in Saudi Arabia is 110 and 220 volt and the total power generated exceeds 40 million mega/h. The industrial sector consumes half of the generated power. In the last few years, the government began to look for other sources for the generation of power like wind and solar energy.

60 Saudi Arabia is a desert land, so how does it meet its water needs?

Due to the scarcity of rain fall, Saudi Arabia gets water from two main sources: ground water and the desalination of sea water. Water desalination began in 1928 when the late King Abdul Aziz ordered the construction of two units for water desalination to supply Jeddah with good drinking water. Currently there are more than 30 water desalination stations on the Red Sea and the Arabian Gulf producing 1073 cubic meter of desalinated water annually.

The biggest of these stations is “Al-Jubail” which is the biggest water desalination station in the world. Other stations are the ones in Jeddah, Makkah, Taif, Madinah and Yanbu.

Ground water provides more than 9500 million cubic meter of water all used for agriculture.

61 Is there a particular body that finalizes the transactions of citizens, expatriates and visitors to Saudi Arabia?

Public service offices are operating all over Saudi Arabia and are assuming the responsibility of finalizing all transactions for citizens, expatriates and visitors to Saudi Arabia. Through these offices one can obtain work visa, work permit, exit-re-entry visa, commercial registration and others. These offices collect fees in return for their services.

The system of public service offices aims at preventing overcrowding at government departments. It is also helpful as expatriates and visitors to the Kingdom do not know the necessary procedures for finalizing their transactions.

62 How can medical services be obtained in Saudi Arabia?

There are a large number of government and private hospitals, medical centers and clinics in Saudi Arabia. They all provide medical services for citizens and expatriates alike. The number of hospitals, medical centers and primary health care centers is estimated at more than 3,000 in addition to a large number of clinics.

There are Some 315 government hospitals with a capacity of more than 64,000 beds in addition to 3500 primary health care centers. The number of private hospitals exceeds 95 with a capacity of 10,000 beds. There are also 650 private health centers, 800 clinics, more than 70 medical labs and 3500 pharmacies.

Government hospitals offer free medical services for Pilgrims and umrah performers and government employees. A number of Saudi health facilities have gained international recognition in the fields of open heart surgery, Siamese separation operations, eye surgeries, tumors and organ transplantation.

Saudi Arabia has reached an advanced stage in medicine by introducing telemedicine connecting the Kingdom's major hospitals with renowned hospitals and medical centers worldwide. Saudi hospitals are now offering

programs for fellowships. There are more than 37 health colleges and institutions for males and females.

63 What about the contribution of Saudi women in the labor market?

Early history informs us that Saudi women were involved in a number of works like sewing clothes, weaving wool and working on farms. Today Saudi women get a good education and obtain the highest degrees and their participation can be seen in all fields.

Estimates put as more than 20% the number of Saudi women in the government sector particularly in the education sector. Saudi women constitute more than 80% of the teaching and administrative staff at the public and private educational institutions. Saudi women are currently seen in a number of medical, media, banking and other posts. On the business side, there are prominent women in Saudi Arabia who are successful entrepreneurs.

The number of small enterprises owned by Saudi women has increased by 30% compared to the situation in the last decade of the 20th century. A number of Saudi women are members of the Saudi Chambers of Commerce and Industry Kingdomwide.

64 What are the main features of the cultural activities in Saudi Arabia?

The main feature of the Saudi cultural and art activities is the integration of heritage with modernity and

commitment to the Islamic teachings.

In the old days “Souq Okaz” was the platform for poets from all over the Arabian Peninsula. Nowadays, public libraries, literary clubs and different festivals represent the cultural façade of modern Saudi Arabia. Seasonal arts and cultural festivals in Saudi Arabia have become attracting elements for prominent intellectuals, scholars and artists in the Arab world.

65 What are the most important cultural and recreational festivals in Saudi Arabia?

The Janadriya National Festival for Heritage and Culture, organized every year by the Saudi National Guard is one of the most important cultural and heritage events in Saudi Arabia. The festival reflects the national identity of the Saudi people. The event is held at Janadriya, about 45 kilometers to the north of Riyadh. The event is organized in heritage village built according to an old architectural style. What distinguishes this festival is that it combines between heritage and traditions with modernity.

Several and various activities are held on the sidelines of this annual event with the participation of famous personalities from the Arab and different other parts of the world.

A large number of summer festivals are held across Saudi Arabia like the ones held in Jeddah, Abha and Dammam.

66 Why is the Janadriya Festival considered the most famous of festivals in Saudi Arabia?

There are a number of factors that make Janadriya Festival the most famous in Saudi Arabia.

It is the main national heritage festival and is patronized by Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz. The Festival is under the responsibility of the Saudi National Guard with its vast materials and human resources.

The Festival has been running annually since 1985. This makes it a momentous occasion which adds to the variety of deliberations and activities held at the Festival. A number of Saudi prominent personalities are honored every year at the Festival.

67 What are the prominent cultural institutions in Saudi Arabia?

There are a number of cultural institutions in the different parts of Saudi Arabia. Most of them are in big cities and in particular Riyadh and Jeddah.

In Riyadh alone one can mention King Abdul Aziz Historical Centre, King Fahd National Library, King Abdul Aziz Centre for Research, King Abdul Aziz Public Library, Prince Faisal Cultural Centre, Prince Faisal bin Fahd Centre for Plastic Arts, the Saudi Society for Arts and Culture and King Faisal Charitable Foundation. The latter organizes an annual contest. Prizes in the fields of science, literature and service of Islam are awarded to prominent

scholars from different parts of the world. The financial awards given by the Foundation are the biggest on a world scale and come directly after the ones awarded by Nobel.

Riyadh hosts many cultural, scientific, intellectual and artists activities. It was selected as the Arab capital for culture in the year 2000 .

68 What about the Saudi architecture and does it differ from one region to another?

The Saudi architecture combines modernity and heritage in terms of design. Saudi houses are large and mostly of two to three floors. In the past, houses were designed in a way that suits the desert climate and branches of palm trees are used extensively in the construction process.

Nowadays houses are built of concrete, with separate receptions for men and women and the Arabian tent located in the front part of the house. There are no major architectural differences in the design of houses in the Kingdom's different regions.

Commercial buildings and hotels in big cities like Riyadh, Makkah, Madinah, Dammam and Jeddah are of different architectural designs and consist of tens of floors.

69 What is the Saudi *ardah* (Folk dance) and how is it performed?

since the early history of Saudi Arabia, the *ardah*, or folk dance symbolizes an expression of courage and

heroism. It was first practiced in Najd in the centre of the Arabian Peninsula and then spread to other regions. It is now the dance of national festivals, wedding ceremonies and other national and religious occasions.

As it is a folklore, it is performed with the sword with recitation of some poetry composed in honor of the homeland.

The Saudi *ardah* is popular and is performed by a large number of ordinary people as well as officials. Janadriya Festival for heritage and Culture assigned a day for the performance of this folk dance with the participation of Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz.

70 What are the most important historical centers and landmarks that can be visited by tourists and visitors of the Saudi capital?

Riyadh is rich with many historical centers, museums and landmarks that can be visited by tourists and visitors. King Abdul Aziz Historical Center is equipped with all necessary facilities. Amongst these facilities are the museum which includes five parks with a total area of 20,000 to 30,000 square meters, Al-Murabaa Palace, King Abdul Aziz Research Center, King Abdul Aziz Public Library, King Abdul Aziz Mosque, water tower and others.

Deriyah is an important historical landmark in Riyadh. Its antiquities reflect an important period of the Kingdom's history and the formation of the Saudi first state.

There are many other recreational facilities and parks in Riyadh.

71 Where can a visitor become acquainted with the Kingdom's old and modern history?

The national museum in Riyadh is the place where a visitor to Saudi Arabia can be acquainted with features of the old and modern history of Saudi Arabia. The museum was established to be a national landmark that enriches the march of education and cultural awareness among the new generation.

The museum covers an area of 17,000 square meters and is located at the eastern side of King Abdul Aziz Historical Center. The total area of its two-floor building is 28,000 square meters. The museum provides a modern educational environment for different society segments as it contains ancient documents, manuscripts, display boards in addition to documentary films.

The museum consists of eight main display halls and two permanent halls in addition to other support facilities.

72 Are there any customs for receiving guests in Saudi Arabia?

Honoring guests is an Islamic characteristic. In one of his sayings Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) says: "Whoever has faith in Allah and the Hereafter should honor his guest." Thus it is not surprising to see Saudis giving warm welcome to their guests.

Saudis receive their guests by offering Arabian coffee

and dates. By shaking the coffee cup gently, the guest indicates that he does not want any more coffee. The food is served in another room. Normally food is taken while people are sitting on the floor. After that people move to the saloon for drinking tea or coffee. When guests leave, the host often accompanies them to the outside gate.

73 What are the most famous foods and drinks in Saudi Arabia?

The kinds of foods differ in Saudi Arabia due to the different parts of the country. Usually the Saudi dish contains meat, rice and vegetables.

Kabsa, cooked rice with meat or chicken, is popular in Saudi Arabia. Meat and chicken are cooked in different ways and were given different names. Spices were often added to the food. *Mandy* and *Mazby* are the most popular ways for cooking meat or chicken

Arabian coffee is a preferred drink that a Saudi is keen to offer to his guests. Dates are served with the Arabian coffee.

74 What are the most prominent wedding customs in Saudi Arabia?

Wedding customs and traditions in Saudi Arabia differ from one region to the other. In Saudi Arabia, a mother or sister is the one who often selects the would-be wife. In

the past, the dowry is presented by the groom and often money and clothes for the bride, her father, mother and sisters were given by the groom. Wedding ceremonies used to be held at homes.

Accompanied by a group of his friends and relatives, the bridegroom used to go to his father-in-law house where he was welcomed

After forty days, the bride goes with her husband to her parents' home and starts to meet her husband's relatives.

Nowadays many things have changed and the wedding festivals are held in hotels or festival halls with separate places for men and women.

75 What advice is given to one who visits or resides in Saudi Arabia?

Saudi Arabia is an Islamic state and all its rules are derived from the Islamic teachings. Whoever visits or resides in Saudi Arabia is advised to oblige and respect these rules and instructions. Saudi laws forbid the selling and consumption of alcohol. All hotels and restaurants abide by these rules and the drinks served in Saudi Arabia are alcohol-free.

Non-Muslim visitors or expatriates working in Saudi Arabia should refrain from eating and drinking in public during the daily hours of the fasting holy month of Ramadan.

Women visiting Saudi Arabia are expected to respect the dress code in the country.

76 What is the Saudi national carrier and the volume and types of services it renders?

Saudi Arabian Airlines (Saudia) is the Saudi national carrier. It was established in 1945. Its current fleet includes Boeing 747-300, Boeing 747-100, Boeing 777-200, Airbus A-300, Douglas MD-90 and MD-11 for cargo.

Saudi Arabian Airlines has developed significantly during the past few years. It operates around 100 daily flights to most world destinations in addition to the busy schedule the national carrier faces during the Hajj and Umrah seasons.

Since 1987, the Saudi national carrier has introduced horizon class on its flights and also introduced an automatic search system for luggage. Currently there are 95 travel agencies serving Saudia passengers plus 12 cargo agencies. Saudia has three main offices in the old airport area, King Khaled International Airport, and the diplomatic quarter in addition to 21 branch offices located at the premises of different government departments and companies in Riyadh.

77 How many airports are there in Saudi Arabia?

There are three international airports in Saudi Arabia namely: King Abdul Aziz Airport in Jeddah, King Khaled Airport in Riyadh and King Fahd Airport in Dammam.

A large number of foreign airlines operate through these three international airports.

Visitors to the western region as well as pilgrims prefer to use King Abdul Aziz International Airport in Jeddah, while those coming to the eastern province are likely to use King Fahd International Airport and those coming to Riyadh use King Khaled International Airport. Passengers who like to travel inside the Kingdom can use domestic flights reaching all regional airports in the various parts of Saudi Arabia. The number of civil airports in the Kingdom is 24.

78 What are the transportation means available for traveling inside Saudi Arabia?

As the Kingdom is a large country, domestic air traveling is the fastest and most comfortable means of traveling from one part to the other. Ticket fares are reasonable. One can also travel by bus as the Saudi Public Transport Company (SAPTCO) operates fully-air-conditioned and comfortable buses that reach all regions in the Kingdom. The intercity roads are equipped with all necessary facilities like security, ambulance services and rest-houses that serve more than 7 million passenger cars, vehicles and buses.

79 Are there any railways in Saudi Arabia?

The first railway in Saudi Arabia was established by an order from the late King Abdul Aziz in 1947. This

line, which was officially inaugurated in 1951 for the transportation of cargo, links Dammam and Dhahran with the capital Riyadh.

In 1985 another 450-kilometer long developed railway was established. Thanks to this new railway one can travel from Dammam to Riyadh in 4 hours instead of 7 hours. The Saudi Railways Organization (SRO) is the party responsible for the management and operation of railway services.

Within the keenness of the Saudi government to establish new railways, the Ministry of Transportation began conducting studies to expand the railway network and grants the private sector an opportunity to invest in this field.

The studies include the construction of two new lines. The first extends from Jeddah Port at the Red Sea to King Abdul Aziz Port in Dammam and King Fahd Port in Jubail in the eastern province. This 950-kilometer railway is known as the east-west line.

The second line, which is 1408 kilometers-long, extends from Riyadh to the northern parts of the Kingdom. It also links Jeddah with Makkah and Madinah with a 570-kilometer-long line to link Yanbu and serves pilgrims, umrah performers and visitors.

80 Is there any public transport in Saudi Arabia and what are the major companies in this sector?

Buses are the main means of public transportation inside the Kingdom. There are many private companies

involved in this business.

The Saudi Public Transport Company (SAPTCO) is the major company in this field. It was established in 1979 as a joint stock company for transporting passengers inside cities and between the various cities in Saudi Arabia. Later the company introduces an overseas transportation service. The company has a capital of one billion Saudi riyals with the government owning 30% of the shares and the rest is owned by businessmen, companies and individuals.

The company has a fleet of more than 1500 buses of different size and kinds in addition to an integrated network of facilities, operation, repair workshops and a trained and expert workforce.

81 What about sea transport in Saudi Arabia and what are the major national companies in this sector?

Sea transportation in Saudi Arabia is known for its huge investment capital as this sector is involved in the transportation of millions of tons of commodities and passengers to and from the Saudi ports located at the Red Sea and the Arabian Gulf.

The National Shipping Company of Saudi Arabia (NSCSA) is the first national company in Saudi Arabia operating in this field. The company was established in 1979, to meet the transportation needs of importers and exporters in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and other countries in the Middle East. It is a joint stock company.

The company's initial capital was SR50 million and

later rose to SR2000 million. The company is based in Riyadh and has three branch offices in Jeddah, Dammam and Jubail besides a number of regional and international offices in Dubai, New York and Tokyo.

The company owns 16 ships and vessels. It operates part of its fleet through an international cooperation with Odfjell Seachem of Norway as the largest operator world-wide.

NSCSA ranks fifth in the world amongst similar companies as it serves more than 41 ports around the globe.

82 How many commercial ports are there in Saudi Arabia and which are the most important ones?

The long coasts of Saudi Arabia, which extend to more than 2410 kilometers (More than 1800 kilometers at the Red Sea and more than 610 at the Arabian Gulf), enable Saudi Arabia to establish many ports with different capacities and facilities. Saudi Arabia has 24 ports.

Jeddah Islamic Port is one of the important ports in Saudi Arabia. It is the main Saudi port on the Red sea and one of the best sea ports in the Middle East. King Abdul Aziz Port on the Arabian Gulf is another important port in Saudi Arabia as it is the main gate for products coming from all parts of the world.

Other important ports in Saudi Arabia: King Fahd Port in Jubail and King Fahd Port in Yanbu which is the biggest port for shipping oil and petrochemicals.

83 Can a visitor to Saudi Arabia rent a car for use inside the country?

There is no problem in renting a car in Saudi Arabia as there are many rent a car offices in every city Kingdom-wide city. One can rent a car without chauffer with a daily rate between SR 50 to SR 150 depending upon the type and model of the car.

One can also take a taxi to move from one place to another. For renting a car without chauffer, a visitor should have an international driving license or a license from his homeland. For an expatriate working in Saudi Arabia he should have a valid Saudi driving license.

84 What is the party responsible for media in Saudi Arabia and what are the TV channels and radio stations that can be watched or listened to?

The Ministry of Culture and Information is the party responsible for media in Saudi Arabia. There are six radio stations transmitting mainly in Arabic with some programs in different languages.

There are four Saudi TV channels, Channel one in Arabic and channel two in English with news in French in addition to Al-Ikhbariya (news) channel and sports channel. The TV transmission covers all parts of Saudi Arabia. With the use of satellite dishes one can watch hundreds of channels transmitting from different world countries.

The Saudi TV programs vary from news, cultural, religious, recreational, films and women and children programs.

85 What are the famous Saudi newspapers and magazines and are there any foreign language newspapers?

There are fifteen daily newspapers in Saudi Arabia like *Al-Bilad*, *Al-Madinah*, *Al-Jazirah*, *Al-Riyadh*, *Okaz*, *Al-Watan*, *Al-Nadwa* and *Al-Youm* in addition to more than 20 weekly, monthly and periodical magazines. This is not including newspapers released by universities and colleges. *Al-Yamamah*, *Al-Dawa*, *Al-Faisal*, and *Iqra* are among the Arabic-language magazines issued in Saudi Arabia. Two newspapers are issued in English language; they are *Arab News* and *Saudi Gazette*. A third English language newspaper, *Riyadh Daily* was closed down at the end of 2003.

There are a number of Saudi electronic newspapers in different languages.

Recently, a number of press establishments began issuing e-journals in different languages. Saudi companies have been at the forefront in issuing international Arabic-language newspapers distributed all over the world.

86 What about the telecommunication and telephone services in Saudi Arabia?

Telephone services remained state-owned till 1997

when a Royal Decree was issued privatizing the telecom sector in line with the government policy to activate the role of the private sector. The Saudi Telecom Company (STC) was established in 1998 as a joint stock company with the government owning 70% of its shares. 30% of the company's shares were offered for IPO in 2002. The move helps in the development of telephone, fax and mobile services.

Installation of a telephone land line in Saudi Arabia will not take more than two days. Mobile service is available through pre-paid cards. Calls can be easily made from Saudi Arabia to any place in the world.

The number of telephone subscribers has reached more than 3 millions while subscribers in mobile phone service has reached more than 5 million. A second mobile service company, Mobily, was licensed in February 2005. A third mobily operator was also granted license. More companies are expected to operate landline network.

87 Is there an Internet service available in Saudi Arabia and who is responsible for this service?

Internet service was introduced in Saudi Arabia by a decision from the Council of Ministers on March 3, 1997. The Riyadh-based King Abdul Aziz City for Science and Technology (KACST) was assigned to introduce and monitor internet service.

KACST assumed the responsibility of issuing licenses for many internet service providers (ISPs) in Saudi Arabia

and also offers technical support and consulting services for these parties.

Later the Internet licensing tasks and other related Internet regulations were assigned to the Communication and Information Technology Commission (CITC). The Internet service was officially started in Saudi Arabia in December 1998.

The Saudi telecom company (STC) is responsible for providing the infrastructure and international Internet linking lines as well as linking lines for ISPs.

The number of Internet users in Saudi Arabia is estimated to be more than 2.5 million.

88 Are there any measures that should be followed by a person who wants to visit Saudi Arabia?

Whoever wants to visit Saudi Arabia should obtain a visa. Citizens of the member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) are exempted. The Saudi diplomatic missions abroad are the ones issuing the entry visa whether for Hajj, Umrah, work or visit.

In an attempt to encourage tourism to the Kingdom, a group tourism visa program was introduced. This can be obtained through travel and tourism agencies accredited to the Saudi embassies abroad.

The Saudi cabinet decided in September 2007 to grant multiple visas for foreign businessmen who want to visit the Kingdom without a need of an invitation from a Saudi company or a letter from the chambers of commerce and industry.

89 What is the party responsible for tourism in Saudi Arabia?

The Supreme Commission for Tourism (SCT) is the party responsible for tourism development and tourism industry.

The Commission was established in April 2000. Since then, the Commission has set up a long-term strategy for developing tourism infrastructure in Saudi Arabia. It encourages the tourism industry and other related tourism activities. SCT has approved a number of projects and programs that aim at qualifying Saudi cadres to be involved in the tourism sector.

SCT abides by all laws of the International Tourism Organization concerning the protection of the rights of tourists and investors in the tourism sector. The Commission follows international standards for evaluating tourism services.

90 What are the prominent tourism attracting areas in Saudi Arabia?

Tourism attracting areas vary in Saudi Arabia. There are a number of archeological, historical, Islamic and pre-Islamic landmarks. The desert is much loved by Saudis and a large number of foreign visitors. The Kingdom beaches are also one of the most attractive destinations for visitors and tourists. There are many parks and entertainment centers in Saudi Arabia as well.

Shopping and entertainment centers and the desert are the areas that attract Saudis and foreigners most during

the winter season. In the summer the coastal areas in Saudi Arabia attract a large number of Saudis, expatriate workers and visitors and lovers of water sports. Abha and Taif are the known summer resorts in Saudi Arabia.

91 Are there any incentives offered to investors in the tourism sector?

The Saudi Commission for Tourism & Antiquities adopts a principle of partnership between the public and private sectors in regard to investment in tourism. The Commission assumes a leading role in coordination and simplification of procedures and rendering of advice. Investors in this sector benefit from a package of incentives like low customs and taxes and other types of support.

The Commission executes a number of tourism programs and, along with investors, finances a number of tourism projects. The Commission, moreover, looks for the best tourism projects that can be established in certain areas and conducts feasibility studies for these projects. SCT prepared an advanced geographic electronic data system covering all parts of the Kingdom including potential tourism areas that can be developed through national or foreign investments. It also provides necessary mechanisms for the protection of tourism areas.

92 Where can a visitor to Saudi Arabia stay?

A visitor to Saudi Arabia will not face any problem

in finding a place to stay in, as there are large numbers of hotels and furnished apartments in all cities. Big five star hotels, small hotels and luxurious furnished apartments owned by the private sector can be seen all over Saudi Arabia.

It is estimated that there are more than 1000 hotels in the Kingdom with a capacity of more than 200,000 rooms in addition to a large number of furnished apartments owned by the private sector.

Except in Makkah and Madinah where hotels are 100% occupied during the Hajj and umrah season, visitors to the Kingdom can find a suitable place to stay with reasonable rates.

93 Are there any places in Saudi Arabia that non-Muslims should not enter?

In general there are no restrictions on the movements of any individual, be he a citizen or expatriate, Muslim or Non Muslim. non-Muslims can visit all parts of Saudi Arabia except the two holy cities of Makkah and Madinah.

Non-Muslims are also not allowed to work in these two cities. All companies working in tourism and recruitment abide by these rules.

94 What does the desert represent to Saudis and what about desert tourism?

Saudis love the desert as it represents to them the place where their grandfathers lived and bred their animals. In

modern Saudi life, the desert is a place where people can go and be away from the bustling cities.

Hunting in the desert is another hobby that Saudis practice. Saudis often go to the desert in groups and spend hours or days camping there in fully-furnished tents. There are companies that have long been involved in this kind of business.

95 What are the most attractive types of domestic tourism?

Recreation facilities, the beaches and shopping festivals are the places that attract most people who go for domestic tourism particularly during the official holidays and the summer season.

In addition to the concern and attention given by the government to beaches and public parks, the private sector has big investments in establishing recreational cities around the Kingdom and this sector is actively taking part in the organization of shopping festivals in coastal cities and resort areas. Due to this, thousands of Saudis and expatriates were attracted by the annual functions aiming at promoting and encouraging domestic tourism. Summer festivals in Jeddah, Abha, Dammam and Madinah are among these seasonal functions.

96 What are the archeological and historical places that a visitor to Saudi Arabia is advised to visit?

It is difficult to list all archeological and historical

sites that a foreigner is advised to visit, as these places are available in many parts of Saudi Arabia. In Riyadh one can visit the historical sites in Deriyah at the suburb of Riyadh, Al-Masmak Palace and King Abdul Aziz Historical Center, to mention but few.

In Makkah and Madinah there are a number of archeological and historical sites. In Al-Ola in Madinah region one can find Madaen Saleh.

In Taif, the summer capital of Saudi Arabia, there are a number of historical dams as well as historical palaces.

In Ahsa there is Sahoud Palace and Ibrahim Palace and Jowatha Mosque, which is the second mosque in Islam after the Prophet's Mosque in Madinah where a Friday prayer was performed. In Hail there are a number of castles and historical palaces. In Tabuk and Jouf we can also find many historical and archeological sites that are of interest to visitors.

97 Where can water sports lovers practice their hobby in Saudi Arabia?

The long coasts of Saudi Arabia along the Red Sea and the Arabian Gulf give a good opportunity for water sports lovers to practice their favorite sports.

Those who love swimming, fishing and other water sport games can go to Obhur, 50 kilometers to the north of the Red Sea city of Jeddah. In Tabuk region there is Afyal beach on the Red Sea, which is famous with its coral reefs. The extension of the Red Sea coast at Asir region is distinguished with its clear water, which is good for diving and also for lovers of wildlife. Farasan Island

on the Red Sea is another attractive site for water sports.

The Kingdom's coasts on the Arabian Gulf has attractive places for water sports too. The half-moon beach is one of these areas. Dammam, in the eastern province, is rich with its many tourism villages.

98 What about equestrian and are there any institutions for equestrian sport in Saudi Arabia?

Saudis love for horses emanates from what a horse represents in the past. In the past a horse in the Arabian Peninsula is a means of transportation. Horses were also used in battles and for the protection of trade caravans. Thus care for horses was given high attention in Saudi Arabia.

In 1965 an equestrian club was established upon an initiative of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz who was then Crown Prince. King Abdullah is the chairman of the club. The club organizes horse races and other equestrian sports.

King Abdul Aziz Horse Center in Deerab, on the outskirts of Riyadh, organizes an annual contest for the best Arabian horse. Prizes are awarded by a number of national and international companies.

99 Where are purebred Arabian horses bred in Saudi Arabia and how one can be assured of its origin?

Breeding of Arabian horses is a hobby and investment at the same time. The Kingdom is famous for its many farms breeding of purebred Arabian horses. The number

of owners and horse breeders in Saudi Arabia exceeds 600. The most famous Arabian horse breeding farms are “Janadriya” for the sons of Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz and “Al-Khaldiya” for Prince Khaled bin Sultan bin Abdul Aziz, King Abdul Aziz Center for the breeding of purebred Arabian horses and “Azba” farm for Prince Ahmed bin Abdul Aziz.

The Ministry of Agriculture maintains records for the descendants of purebred Arabian horses in Saudi Arabia. By using these records one can check the origin of more than 3600 horses. The ministry also gives utmost care to horses through King Abdul Aziz Center for original horses, which was established in 1964 and also via the Kingdom’s membership of the World Arabian Horse Organization (WAHO) and the European Conference of Arabian Horse Organizations (ECAHO).

100 Why do Saudis love camel racing and what are the most famous camel races in Saudi Arabia?

Camel races have been known in the Arabian Peninsula since old days. Saudis continue to preserve this heritage and now camel races attract large numbers of camel lovers.

The annual camel race at Jandadriya is a well-known race in Saudi Arabia as it is organized on the sidelines of the National Festival for Heritage and Culture. The annual camel race is organized by the Equestrian Club in collaboration with the Saudi National Guard. The race is attended by a large number of Saudis who love this popular sport. It reminds them of the close relation between the Arabian desert and camels.